Bull Trout
North Fork John Day River Metapopulation

Summer Steelhead
Mid Columbia Evolutionary Significant Unit

Biological Assessment

Monument Complex Fire Recovery Project

Project Description: The objective of the proposed action is to accomplish restoration of fire suppression activities, primarily seeding of dozer lines, and reconstruction of fences to control livestock movement. The seeding will consist of aerial application of a grass seed mix to stabilize soil disturbed during suppression activities on Bureau of Land Management lands in the North Fork John Day River sub-basin. Fence reconstruction will occur on both boundary fences and interior fences. Approximately 15 miles of fence will be reconstructed, ranging from total rebuilding to replacing wood material only. This portion of the Monument Complex included 15,082 acres of private, U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands. The Timber Basin recovery will be addressed under a separate Environmental Assessment.

Species Status:

Bull trout (Salvelinus confluentus)

Bull trout are reduced in both numbers and distribution in the North Fork John Day sub-basin from historic levels. Currently spawning and rearing occurs in headwater reaches and tributaries of the North Fork above the confluence of Camas Creek at River Mile 56.7. The river within BLM lands (River Mile 25 to 38) is winter migratory habitat. Summer water temperatures preclude any rearing below Camas Creek confluence. Winter migrants have been documented by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in the mainstem John Day River near Spray, Oregon at River Mile 170. The North Fork /mainstem confluence is at River Mile 184.5. It is unknown if these bull trout are of North Fork, Middle Fork or Mainstem origin. No critical habitat is located within the fire area.

Mid Columbia ESU Summer Steelhead (Oncorhynchus mykiss)

Summer steelhead utilize the North Fork John Day river for migration and spring/early summer rearing before water temperatures get high. Several tributaries within the fire perimeter are also used for spawning and rearing. These fish bearing tributaries with their confluence include:

Cabin Creek (Rm 28), Ditch Creek (Rm 35.4) and Mallory Creek (Rm 37.6). No estimate of production from these tributaries is available, however, redd counts have been 3 or less per stream the last 2 years. This year, 2001, was a drought year and all three streams became intermittent in early August and remained without surface flow into mid October. Salmonid fish were observed in several residual pools but it could not be determined if these were redband trout or steelhead juveniles.

Yearling returning adults to the John Day basin are estimated between 4,000 to 25,000 based on index redd counts by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. However, record numbers are currently being counted over Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River and estimates during the early fall project 65% of these fish are destined for the John Day system.

Chinook Salmon (Oncorhynchus tshawytscha)

Chinook salmon utilize the North Fork John Day reaches above Camas Creek for spawning and rearing. These reaches are addressed under the essential fish habitat as required. Migratory habitat would include the portion of the North Fork in the fire area. No activities are proposed that would alter this migratory habitat.

Scope of Federal Activities

The emphasis of this assessment is to evaluate the restoration and recovery activities of the Monument Complex fire. Rehabilitation of dozer fire lines were completed in mid September as the fire was controlled under the direction of Oregon Department of Forestry. This work consisted of recontouring and waterbarring of dozer and hand control lines. None of the rehabed lines were seeded. The proposed action is to aerial seed a perennial grass and annual winter wheat mixture to reduce potential of soil movement into streams during the winter/spring precipitation period. No additional soil disturbance will occur during this action. The helicopter landing site will be at the end of Grant County Road 15 on private land, disturbed during the suppression activities for a safety zone. This site is greater than 300 feet from the North Fork John Day River and on a ridge top. Travel to the site will be over improved county roads from U.S. Highway 395.

Fence reconstruction will occur on existing fences that wood structure material was damaged or completely burned by the fire. Steel posts will be used to replace some wood material and wood stays will be replaced where needed. The majority of the fencing is on upland hill slopes and only crosses the tributary streams. The steepness of the terrain will require manual transport of material from staging sites on ridge tops and existing roads. Motor vehicles will use existing roads to transport material to the various sites. No fences cross the North Fork John Day River.

Livestock grazing on existing allotments within the fire perimeter will be suspended for 2 years to allow recovery of vegetation.

Effects of the action

The effects of this rehabilitation action is designed as a beneficial effect. The seeding of control lines is to reduce potential sediment into fish bearing streams. The disturbed soils in the fire area are subject to erosion from winter precipitation as well as infrequent heavy summer storm events. By aerial application of seed no additional ground disturbance will occur.

The fence reconstruction is likewise a beneficial effect. Although allotments within the fire are not scheduled for grazing, some boundary fences were damaged that were adjacent to private lands. The reconstruction will ensure livestock are not likely to trespass on Bureau of Land Management lands. The reconstruction will not require soil disturbance or mechanized equipment.

Determination

This action is determined to be a May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect to either individuals or habitat because of the beneficial nature. Neither of the proposed actions will improve or degrade any of the pathways and indicators for bull trout or summer steelhead or impact “essential fish habitat” for spring chinook salmon.